

The University of Chicago

THE RISE OF THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

1938

By

B. LE ROY BURKHART

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THE RISE OF THE CHRISTIAN PRIESTHOOD

B. LE ROY BURKHART

CHRISTIANITY began its career without an official ministry, but by the middle of the third century it had a priesthood which corresponded fairly well with the definition given by Origen in one of his sermons on Leviticus: "And who is priest? He . . . who offers to God gifts and redeeming sacrifices, who intervenes between God and men as a propitiator."¹ When, how, and why did this development occur? Was it an imitation of Judaism or of one of the contemporary gentile cults? Was it an indigenous growth? Or was it a response to several influences?

The rise of the Christian priesthood was only one aspect of the rise of the Christian cult with its priests, altars, and sacrifices. One might characterize it as part of the "materialization" of worship. The most practicable approach to the problem, then, seems to be a study of two tendencies present in the Mediterranean world at the beginning of our era. One of them was the spiritualizing trend toward the use of "temple," "priest," and "sacrifice" in transferred senses:

Let my prayer rise like incense before thee,
The lifting of my hands like the evening offering!²

The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart,
O God, thou wilt not despise.³

The second tendency was the conservative, cultic interest which insisted, in the words of Cotta the Academic, "I . . . am a priest, and . . . think that religions and ceremonies ought sacredly to be maintained."⁴

¹ *In Lev. hom.* ii. 3.

² *Ps.* 141:2.

³ *Ps.* 51:17.

⁴ *Cic. De nat. deor.* i. 22.

I

The spiritualization of cult concepts in Judaism had begun with the condemnation of mere ritual piety by the eighth-century prophets. In the two centuries before and the first century after Christ we find equally vigorous criticism of the abuses of the priestly establishment and similar definitions of true religion as consisting in repentance, the confession of sin, prayer, atonement by fasting, the singing of psalms, the giving of thanks, the keeping of the Law, and in general the honoring of God with "purity of soul and holy conviction" rather than with gifts and sacrifices.⁵ At least two organized groups in Judaism had little to do with the temple: the Community of the New Covenant in Damascus and the Essenes. None of the Zadokite priests were permitted to serve in the temple unless they had kept the whole law;⁶ and, although the Essenes brought incense offerings, their rites of purification when sacrificing were so peculiar that even these were excluded from the shrine.⁷

The obvious background for this spiritualizing tendency was the national cult itself. Until the destruction of the temple by Titus the whole sacrificial institution continued to function. It survived because, in spite of its defects, the great majority of people saw in it the divinely ordained religion of Israel.⁸ For some this meant no more than acquiescence in the cult as an inheritance from the past or as part of the structure of the Jewish state.⁹ Others were highly enthusiastic about the temple and sacrifices.¹⁰ It was the Aaronic priest who bestowed the

⁵ Pss. Sol. 8:10-14; 9:11-15; 15:3-6; Test. Levi 3:4-8; 14:5-8; 16:1-5; Zad. Frag. 7:8-18; I Enoch 40:3-9; Wisd. of Sol. 18:20-25; Sir. 34:18 ff.; 35:1-13; Jub. 30:13-22; Aristéas 170, 234; Sib. Or. iv. 24-30, 165-70; II Bar. 85:3; Philo *De plant.* 107 f.; *De spec. leg.* i. 80-97, 166-76; ii. 145 ff., 193-203.

⁶ Zad. Frag. 8:11-20; 14:1-4.

⁷ Jos. *B.J.* ii. 8. 5, 8; *Ant.* xviii. 1. 5; Philo *Quod omn. prob. lib.* 75.

⁸ Sir. 7:29 ff.; 35:1-10; Test. Reub. 6:8-12.

⁹ I Macc.; Ass. Mos.; Wisd. of Sol.; Philo *De migr. Abr.* 89-93.

¹⁰ Jub.; Sib. Or. iii. 573-95, 624-31; III Macc. 1:6-2:24; II Enoch 59:1 f.; Jos. *C. Apion.* ii. 22 f.

blessing of the Lord and secured atonement for the sins both of the individual and of the world.¹¹ More than one man experienced a kind of ecstasy as he watched the high priest officiate or thought of the magnificence of Aaron at his inauguration.¹² It is not surprising, then, that in A.D. 70, when there were no more animals available for sacrifices this lack was felt to be the greatest calamity that could have befallen Israel.¹³

The natural and immediate reaction to the destruction of the temple and city was to lament the loss of the place of atonement and to bewail the separation of Israel from the Father in Heaven.¹⁴ Despair was soon followed by a lively hope of restoration. God would not permit the sacrificial system which he had ordained to be utterly destroyed by the lawless heathen.¹⁵ This hope appears to have been vital during the first third of the second century and then to have faded. Thereafter the rabbis became the active spiritualizers of cult concepts and elaborated a theory of substitutes for the traditional sacrifices. As early as the destruction by Titus it was taught by R. Jochanan b. Zak-kai that kindness and charity make atonement,¹⁶ while R. Ish-mael of the next generation assigned the same power to repentance.¹⁷ One of Akiba's pupils added bodily suffering to this list,¹⁸ and others described the entertainment of a scholar in

¹¹ Sir. 45:15-23; Jub. 34:18 f.; Test. Reub. 6:8-12; II Macc. 3; 12:39-45; Sib. Or. iii. 772, 808.

¹² Sir. 45:6-22; 49:15-50:24; Aristas 84-99.

¹³ Jos. *B.J.* vi. 2. 1; Taan. 4:6.

¹⁴ IV Ezra 3:24-28; 5:23-28; II Bar. 35:2-5; Ber. 32b; Aboth de R. Nathan 4, cited by H. Wenschkewitz, "Die Spiritualisierung der Kultusbegriffe Tempel, Priester, und Opfer im N.T.," *Αγγελος*, I (1932), 95.

¹⁵ Apoc. Abr. 25-29; Yoma 38a; Shab. 12b. Cf. also *Shemôneh 'Esreh* and the careful editing of sacrificial laws in the Mishnaic *Seder Kodashim*.

¹⁶ Aboth de R. Nathan 4; B. B. 10b; Sukka 49b.

¹⁷ Yoma 86a; Aboth de R. Nathan 29, cited by Wenschkewitz, *op. cit.*, p. 97. Cf. Jos. *C. Apion.* ii. 22; *Ant.* vi. 7. 4; II Enoch 45:1 ff.

¹⁸ Mekilta to Exod. 20:20.

one's home,¹⁹ humbleness of spirit, the recitation of payers,²⁰ the reading of the rules for sacrifice,²¹ and the study of Torah²² as the equivalent of many sacrifices.

II

The process of spiritualizing worship in the pagan world began with the earliest of the Greek philosophers.²³ Empedocles and Heraclitus both ridiculed those who sought to purify themselves by shedding the blood of animals. Empedocles²⁴ could see the rationale of offering myrrh and incense, but Heraclitus²⁵ commended only complete inward purity. These became the general attitudes of those philosophers of the first Christian centuries who carried their message to the people of the Empire. They poured contempt on popular religion and the worship of images; such worship should be recognized as based on custom only, not on any reality.²⁶ The best way to honor the gods is first of all to search for truth and to believe in the true nature of the gods, then to acknowledge them as commanders of the universe and to seek to imitate their goodness.²⁷ A pure heart and a virtuous life are the true sacrifices;²⁸ true worship con-

¹⁹ Ber. 10b.

²⁰ Sanh. 43b; Sotah 5b; Ber. 26b.

²¹ Taan. 27b.

²² Erub. 63b; Makk. 10a; Meg. 16b.

²³ Cf. O. Casel, "Die Λογική θυσία der antiken Mystik in christlich-liturgischer Umdeutung," *Jahrbuch fuer Liturgiewissenschaft*, IV (1924), 37 ff.; and *Die Liturgie als Mysterienfeier* (rev. ed.; Freiburg, i. Br.: Herder, 1923), pp. 105-12.

²⁴ H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (2. Auf.; Berlin: Weidmann, 1906), frag. 128.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, frags. 5 and 69.

²⁶ Lucian *Demonax* 11, 63-67; Seneca *apud* Aug. *De civ. dei* vi. 10; Dio Chrys. x. 27 f.

²⁷ Seneca *Ep.* xcv. 50; Epictetus *Ench.* 31; *Disc.* ii. 16. 42; Dio Chrys. xii. 27; Plutarch *De Is. et Os.* 2, 11; Maximus of Tyre *Or.* 5, 8, cited by P. E. More, *The Religion of Plato* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), p. 294; and G. Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925), p. 100, n. 1.

²⁸ Lucian *Dem.* 11, 63-67; Seneca *Epp.* xli. 1; cxv. 48; *apud* Lact. *Div. inst.* vi. 25; *De benef.* iv. 25. 1; i. 6. 3.

sists in pure rational sacrifices of thanksgiving, praise, and silent contemplation.²⁹

The pagan world, however, was just as conservative as the Jewish. The philosophers might reinterpret or allegorize the rites of the cults at will, but comparatively few were willing to neglect or radically to change the rites themselves. Lucian of Samosata stood almost alone in despising all worship of the gods, even men's prayers.³⁰ The Stoics as a group regarded it as "always appropriate to make libations and sacrifices, and to give of the first fruits after the manner of our fathers."³¹ Even Seneca, the most radical, admitted that sacrifice, when offered by good men, was pleasing to the gods and that in certain cases prayers, vows, and expiations affected the course of history.³² Plutarch was priest of the Pythian Apollo for many years and could not conceive that anyone would ever have "sufficiently sacrificed, gone in procession, and led dances in honor of the gods."³³ Religion, the observance of the ancestral customs, was very generally regarded as the foundation of the state and the guaranty of its stability.³⁴ It was this faith which inspired the punctilious ritual performed by Vespasian at the restoration of the Capitol,³⁵ the recitation of the archaic Salian litany by the young Marcus Aurelius, and the offering of countless victims to the guardian gods of Rome by the same emperor in days of pestilence or war.³⁶

²⁹ *Corp. Herm.* i. 22, 31; v. 10 f.; xiii. 17-21; *Asclepius* 41; Epictetus *Disc.* i. 16. 15-21; 4. 28-32; iv. 4. 18; Apoll. Tyan. *Epp.* 26 f.; *apud* Eus. *Praep. evan.* iv. 13; Numenius, *ibid.*, xi. 22.

³⁰ *De sacrificio.*

³¹ Epictetus *Ench.* 31; *Disc.* ii. 20. 23-27; iii. 21. 12-16; Dio Chrys. xiii. 85; Min. Felix *Oct.* 6; Cornutus *Summary of Greek Theology* 35, cited by A. D. Nock, *Conversion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 120.

³² *De benef.* i. 6. 3; *Quaestiones naturales* ii. 37 f.

³³ *An seni resp. ger. sit* 17; Maximus of Tyre *Or.* 8.

³⁴ Cic. *De nat. deor.* iii. 5; i. 22.

³⁵ Tac. *Hist.* iv. 53.

³⁶ Jul. Capitolinus *Marc. Ant.* iv. 1-4; xiii. 1 ff.; cf. also Tac. *Ann.* xii. 8; Suet. *Dom.* 5, 8; Ael. Spartianus *Hadrian* xxii. 10; Jup. Capit. *Ant. Pius* xi. 5; xiii. 4.

Among the many religions and priesthoods of the Empire there were two sacramental cults which are of particular interest in a study of the Christian priesthood because both of them were very active in the period of its rise, namely, the century from A.D. 150 to 250. These were the mysteries of Mithra and of Isis. The early Church Fathers knew them to have rites of baptism and a common meal so like the Christian that they could be explained only as demonic imitations of the Christian ceremonies.³⁷ That Christians also had contact with some of the other mysteries is proved conclusively by the frescoes and inscription in the catacomb of Praetextatus, which were placed there in the middle of the third century in honor of "Vincentius, the high-priest of the god Sabazios."³⁸ Unfortunately, there are not enough data to interpret the term *antistes*.

The fragmentary evidence indicates that the Mithraic cult had a priesthood of men who had passed through all or many of the several degrees of initiation.³⁹ Each Mithraic community perhaps had at its head a *pater* or *pater patrum* who was the *summus pontifex* and the *pater sacrorum* mentioned by Tertullian.⁴⁰ The priest, *sacerdos* or *antistes*, was often, but not always, a member of the *patres*.⁴¹ According to one inscription, a man who was *pater patrum* was also *magister* of the *ordo sacerdotum*.⁴² M. Cumont, in the first enthusiasm of his reconstruction of Mithraic ritual, doubtless drew an exaggerated picture of the role of the priesthood. But it is quite probable that

³⁷ Justin *Apol.* i. 66; Tert. *De praescr. haer.* 40; *De bapt.* 5.

³⁸ W. O. E. Oesterley, "The Cult of Sabazios," in *The Labyrinth*, ed. S. H. Hooke (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1935), pp. 151 ff.

³⁹ Cf. F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* (2 vols.; Bruxelles: H. Lamertin, 1896-99); J. Toutain, *Les Cultes païens dans l'Empire romain* (Paris: Leroux, 1911), II, 121-77; and F. Legge, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), II, 224-76.

⁴⁰ *De praescr. haer.* 40; *Apol.* 8; cf. *CIL* vi. 749-53; 1778 f.

⁴¹ *CIL* vi. 2271, 3272; xiv. 66, 403.

⁴² *CIL* vi. 2151.

the man who officiated at the seven sacraments of initiation, who celebrated the rites of baptism and the sacred meal, and who presided at dedications was the priest who offered the sacrifices and libations to the higher and lower gods

The Isiac priesthood is much better known than the Mithraic. At various places there were permanent professional priesthoods presided over by a chief priest, but we are told nothing more about the hierarchy. All the priests lived in the temple, were marked off by the tonsure and the Isiac robes,⁴³ and abstained from woolen garments, wine, pork, fish, and certain vegetables.⁴⁴ Chastity was essential in the celebrant of the holy mysteries, and Tertullian held up the priests of Isis as reproachful examples of continence to professing followers of Christ.⁴⁵ These priests served at three types of public ceremonies. At the daily services of matins and nones their duties included the preparation of the altar, the libation of holy water, and the offering of incense;⁴⁶ at the spring festival of the Ploia-phesia they bore the relics and mysteries of the most powerful gods and consecrated the ship;⁴⁷ their part in the annual festival of the passion and resurrection of Osiris is not clearly defined.⁴⁸ In addition to officiating at these public ceremonies, the priests had the duty of advising people who desired initiation and of administering the initiation itself. The latter was a long process involving sacrifices, baptism, instruction, enactment of a ritual death and resurrection, and a final banquet.⁴⁹ Thus the Isiac

⁴³ Apuleius *Metamorphoses* xi; cf. Tibullus i. 3. 30; Martial xii. 29. 19; Juvenal vi. 534; Suet. *Otho* 12; *CIG* 6006; *CIL* X, 6445; *Or. Hens.* 1878, 6666; cf. also frescoes at Pompeii and Herculaneum, J. Leipoldt, *Die Religionen in der Umwelt des Urchristentums* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1926), Figs. 44, 53-57.

⁴⁴ Plutarch *De Is. et Os.* 4-8, 32.

⁴⁵ *De exh. cast.* 13.

⁴⁶ Tib. i. 3. 31; Mart. x. 48. 1; Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 52, 79 f.; Apul. *Meta.* xi. 20; Arnobius vii. 32.

⁴⁷ Apul. *Meta.* xi. 7-17.

⁴⁸ Cf. Juvenal viii. 29; vi. 533 f.; Lucan viii. 831 ff.; Min. Felix. *Oct.* 21; Lact. *Div. inst.* i. 21; Firm. Maturnus *De err. prof. rel.* 2: 1-4; Plutarch *De Is. et Os.* 39.

⁴⁹ Apul. *Meta.* xi. 19-24.

priest was an intermediary between God and man who had the power of revealing the mystery of eternity and preparing souls to meet their gods.

III

Jesus and his disciples were Jews and attended both the temple and the synagogue.⁵⁰ It is true that Jesus' major interest was in the Kingdom and its righteousness, but that interest did not cause him to abandon the cult. It did mean that persons making sacrifices should come in the proper spirit and that abuses of the cult should be corrected.⁵¹

The first Christians in Jerusalem remained Jews. They regularly attended worship in the temple and made Solomon's colonnade a frequent meeting place.⁵² They were faithful to Torah and insisted that Jesus had not come to put an end to the Law but to fulfil it.⁵³ The only Christian rite which they seem to have observed was a common meal; "they broke their bread together."⁵⁴ Although Peter was the leading spirit in the beginning, the legalist James soon came to be the recognized head of the society.⁵⁵ Under his guidance, and that of his successors,⁵⁶ the community remained little more than a sect of Judaism.

In addition to this Jewish, Aramaic-speaking church there was also very early in Christian history a Greek-speaking church. This was the group to which Stephen, Philip, and the other evangelists belonged. These Hellenists, it would seem, had no high regard for the temple worship and neglected the

⁵⁰ Matt. 21:23 and par.; 26:55 and par.; 21:14 f.; Mark 12:35; Luke 19:47; 21:37; John 2:14 ff.; 5:14; 7:28; 8:20, 59; 10:23; 18:20.

⁵¹ Matt. 5:23 f.; 8:4 and par.; 12:12 f. and par.; 15:1-20 and par.; Luke 17:14; John 2:13-22; Mark 12:32 ff.

⁵² Acts 2:46 f.; 3:1-11; 5:12, 20, 42.

⁵³ Acts 21:20-26; Matt. 5:17 f.

⁵⁴ Acts 2:46.

⁵⁵ Acts 12:17; 15:1-29; 21:18; Gal. 1:18 f.; 2:9-12; Eus. *H.E.* ii. 23. 4-18; iv. 5. 3; vii. 19; Epiphanius *Adv. haer.* lxvi. 20.

⁵⁶ Eus. *H.E.* iv. 22. 4; iii. 11; 20. 1-6; 32. 1-6.

ritual requirements, thus laying themselves open to the persecution in which Stephen was martyred and the rest scattered through Palestine and beyond it.⁵⁷ To this group of Hellenistic Christians, perhaps, we should credit the earliest form of the tradition of the Lord's Supper as Lietzmann⁵⁸ has reconstructed it from the Gospels and Paul: "He took bread, blessed, broke it and said: This is my body. And he took a cup and said: This is my blood of the covenant [or, the covenant through my blood]." The Christians who believed this thought of Jesus as a sacrificial victim whose body was slain for the believers and whose blood was shed to establish a new covenant between God and man. Consequently, there was no need for any further sacrifice on the great altar in the temple.

For a century after this, from Paul to Justin, and in certain areas for a longer period, Christianity clearly belonged in the "spiritualizing" trend which has been noted in both Judaism and paganism. Christ was said to be the Passover lamb who gave himself as a "fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."⁵⁹ He was himself the apostle and high priest of the new religion, and his priesthood was unique and untransferable.⁶⁰ Sometimes it was said that the redeemed had become a "kingdom of priests" and those who suffered martyrdom served in the heavenly temple;⁶¹ more frequently the Christian community was the temple of God and the individual members the dwelling-places of the Spirit of God.⁶² Since they held such beliefs, it was natural that the early Christians should offer only spiritual sacrifices of helpfulness, generosity, righteousness, purity of heart

⁵⁷ Acts 6-8.

⁵⁸ H. Lietzmann, *Messe und Herrenmahl: Eine Studie zur Geschichte der Liturgie* (Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Weber, 1926), pp. 218-21.

⁵⁹ I Cor. 5:7; Rom. 3:25; 8:3; Col. 1:20; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 10:10-14; Rev. 5:6-12; I Pet. 1:18-21; 2:24 f.; John 1:29, 36; I John 2:2; 4:10; *Barn.* 7:3, 5.

⁶⁰ Heb., *passim*; Ign. *Phila.* 9; Polyc. *Phil.* 12:2; I Clem. 61:3.

⁶¹ Rev., *passim*; I Pet. 2:9; cf. Rom. 15:16.

⁶² Eph. 2:19-22; I Cor. 3:16 f.; 6:19 f.; I Pet. 2:5; *Barn.* 4:11; 6:15; 16:6-10; II Clem. 9:3, 10.

and lips, prayer, praise, and mystical communion.⁶³ Even though Paul emphasized the reception of the very body and blood of the Redeemer who was sacrificed for men's deliverance he did not regard the offering of the Eucharist as a repetition of that sacrifice.⁶⁴ To one looking back over the development of Christianity it appears as if the new religion had been engaged for the first century in differentiating itself from Judaism and the pagan cults, in practically all of which material sacrifices were offered.

During the century before Justin Martyr there was no uniformity in ecclesiastical organization. The leaders were called variously apostles, inspired preachers, prophets, teachers, wonder-workers, missionaries, pastors, elders, bishops, and deacons. With the growth of the movement and the appearance of sects it became necessary to develop a strong leadership which would look after the internal government of the churches, preach and exemplify the true faith, and deal with heresy. Sometimes the power of discipline was assumed by the congregation,⁶⁵ sometimes by the whole group of presbyters,⁶⁶ but most frequently by the bishop.⁶⁷ It is significant, however, that the power to forgive sins was not claimed by these officials until the end of the second century. The Johannine tradition that Christ had given such power to all the apostles was taken to mean that everyone might approach God to ask for his own or another's forgiveness;⁶⁸ only the martyrs were recognized to have special privileges in according grace to those who had lapsed during the persecutions.⁶⁹

⁶³ Phil. 2:17; 4:18; Rom. 12:1; I Cor. 14:26-33; Heb. 13:15 f.; I Pet. 2:5; I John; 4 f.; *Odes Sol.* xx. 1-4; *Barn.* 2:4, 10; *II Clem.* 3:1-4:3; 9:3, 10; Polyc. *Phil.* 4:3; Ign. *Smyr.* 6, 8; *Eph.* 13, 20; *Phila.* 4; *Magn.* 7.

⁶⁴ Cf. I Cor. 5:7; 10:14-22; 11:17-34; Phil. 2:17; 4:18; Rom. 12:1; 15:16.

⁶⁵ Matt. 18:15-18.

⁶⁶ *I Clem.* 57:1.

⁶⁷ Matt. 16:17 ff.; II John 10; Ign. *Phila.* 8; Polyc.; Epiphanius *Adv. haer.* xlii. 1. 3-6 and Pseudo-Tert. *Adv. omn. haer.* 6.

⁶⁸ John 20:22 f.; I John 5:13-17; Ign. *Phila.* 8; Hermas *Sim.* ii. 5 f.; viii. 11; *Man.* xii. 6; Polyc. *Phil.* 4:3; *II Clem.* 16:1, 4; Justin *Apol.* i. 61, 65 f.

⁶⁹ Eus. *H.E.* v. 1.

The rapid expansion of Christianity and its development as a distinct religion claiming to worship the only true God and refusing to bring any sacrifices in honor of the gods of the cities and empire invited opposition from the more conservative pagans.⁷⁰ Christians were accused of being atheists.⁷¹ The apologists met the charge by adducing the same arguments as many of the philosophers had used and were using, namely, that God, the Creator and Father of this universe, does not need blood, burnt-offerings, or incense, for he is perfect and needs nothing; the noblest sacrifice is for us to know him as the Creator and to offer him bloodless and rational sacrifices.⁷² With the coming of Christ all bloody offerings had been superseded. Those who repented now cleansed themselves "by faith through the blood of Christ and his death,"⁷³ and brought pure sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving and the imitation of the virtues of God himself.⁷⁴ Justin Martyr, writing at Rome in the middle of the second century, was the first to specify the prayers at the Eucharist as the primary Christian sacrifice;⁷⁵ but in the next thirty years the identification of the Eucharist as the Christian sacrifice seems to have been established.⁷⁶ Irenaeus claimed that only the species of sacrifice had been changed at Christ's coming; bloody sacrifice had been abolished in favor of "the new oblation of the new covenant," an offering to God of "the first fruits of his created things."⁷⁷ Thus under the necessity of meeting pagan criticism Christian leaders brought back into use the ancient terminology of religion.

⁷⁰ Cf. Pliny *Ep.* x. 96; I Tim. 3:1-7.

⁷¹ Cf. M. H. Shepherd, Jr., "The Early Apologists and Christian Worship," *Journal of Religion*, XVIII (1938), 60-75.

⁷² Athenagoras *Suppl. pro Christ.* 13; Aristides *Apol.* 1:10; 13:4; Justin *Apol.* 1. 10, 13; *Diognetus* 3:4 f.; Clem. Alex. *Stromata* vi. 5. 39.

⁷³ Justin *Dial.* 13:1; cf. 23:3; 43:1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 86:6; 116:3; 117:2; *Apol.* 1. 10, 13; *Acta Apollonii* 8 f., 44.

⁷⁵ *Dial.* 117:1; 41:2 f.; 28:5-29:1; *Apol.* 1. 13.

⁷⁶ *Didache* 14; Iren. *Adv. haer.* iv. 17. 4 f.; *Acta Petri* iii. 2 (M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924], p. 304).

⁷⁷ *Adv. haer.* iv. 17. 1-5; 18. 1-6.

The second century seems also to have witnessed the transformation of the communion table into an altar. When sacrificial terminology was applied to the Eucharist, it was natural to speak of the communicants as coming to "the altar of God" or "sharing in the altar."⁷⁸ Irenaeus believed that it was God's will that Christians should "offer a gift at the altar." Nevertheless, he located the altar "in heaven (for toward that place are our prayers and oblations directed)."⁷⁹ He was reluctant to leave the ancient concepts that the real temple and altar are in heaven and that all disciples of the Lord are priests.⁸⁰ In A.D. 180, then, Christianity regarded the Eucharist as a bloodless and rational sacrifice and had begun to refer to the communion table as an altar; but there is no evidence⁸¹ that the officiants at the Eucharist were called "priests" in any sense that would distinguish them from other Christians.

In the West the Christian priesthood appeared suddenly both in Rome and in Africa only twenty years after Irenaeus. The schismatic Hippolytus wrote in his prayer for the consecration of a bishop:

Thou who knowest the hearts of all, grant to this thy servant, whom thou hast chosen to be bishop, [to feed thy holy flock], and to serve as thy high priest without blame, ministering night and day, to propitiate thy countenance without ceasing and to offer thee the gifts of thy holy church. And by the Spirit of high-priesthood to have authority to remit sins according to thy commandment, to assign the lots according to thy precept, to loose every bond according to the authority which thou gavest to thy disciples, and to please thee in meekness and purity of heart, offering to thee an odour of sweet savor.⁸²

That so strict a traditionalist as Hippolytus could refer to the bishop so unqualifiedly as a high priest indicates that the use of sacerdotal terminology had been well established at Rome.

⁷⁸ *Acta Petri* iii. 2; *Acta Joh.* xvi (James, *op. cit.* p. 260).

⁷⁹ *Adv. haer.* iv. 18. 4-6.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 8. 2 f.; 20. 11; v. 34. 3. So also *Ep. Apost.* 13, 51.

⁸¹ "High priests" in *Did.* 13 is suggested by gifts to be given to the prophets and seems not to apply to the local bishops.

⁸² *Ap. Trad.* 3:4 ff.; cf. 9:11; 30; *Philosophumena* Prooem.

For there can be little doubt that the duties of officials as he set them forth in the *Apostolic Tradition* were those of the Roman church before any rift had appeared in that church. Perhaps the priestly bishop had appeared before the ascent of Zephyrinus to the episcopacy in *circa* A.D. 198. From Tertullian we gain the impression that in North Africa the use of sacerdotal terminology was a recent development, because he had to explain that the *summus sacerdos* was the bishop.⁸³

Both in Rome and in North Africa the high-priestly bishop was recognized to have the power to forgive venial sins. Callistus' claim to forgive the deadly sins of adultery and fornication was one of the factors which led to the schism at Rome, and there is some evidence that he or his successor soon extended the claim to include idolatry.⁸⁴ While the evidence does not permit us to see how the extension was effected at Rome, we are able to follow it at Carthage.

The early church had thought of idolatry as one of the deadly sins which only God himself could forgive. This, too, had been the attitude of Hippolytus and Tertullian. Nevertheless, the martyrs had arrogated to themselves the power to accord grace to those who had lapsed in the persecutions. Feeling his own responsibility for the church as keenly as he did, Cyprian was not satisfied to leave the martyrs of Carthage a free field. They had been too prodigal with their certificates. Yet he refused to make a general rule and insisted that a council must decide what should be done. Meanwhile, he directed that only penitent apostates who held certificates from the martyrs and who were on the point of death were to be received back into the church.⁸⁵ This was a practice which the Roman church had initiated in the hope that thus the penitents might be strengthened for the next persecution.⁸⁶ Cyprian held his position in

⁸³ *De bapt.* 17; *De exh. cast.* 7.

⁸⁴ *Philos.* ix. 11 f.; Tert. *De pud.* 1, 5, 18-22; Origen *De orat.* xxviii. 10. Cf. L. Duchesne, *Early History of the Christian Church* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1915), I, 212-30; B. S. Easton, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1934), pp. 16-22.

⁸⁵ *Epp.* 18-20 (12-14).

⁸⁶ *Ep.* 8 (2).

spite of an insolent letter from the confessors and some insubordination among his clergy from January, A.D. 250, until early in A.D. 251, when it was possible for the First Council of Carthage to meet.⁸⁷ After long deliberation on the problem and on the Novatian schism, which had occurred at Rome over this very same problem, the council decided that the lapsed who had not actually offered the sacrifice should be restored by the bishop after a considerable term of penance, but that those who had sacrificed should be received only at the hour of death provided they had continued penitent until that time. Although this was not what Cyprian had recommended in his tractate *De lapsis*, he accepted the decision. Henceforth the certificates of the martyrs were of no value in securing restoration from the bishop. A year later, when another persecution was threatened, the Second Council of Carthage met and decided that all the apostates who had repented should be admitted to immediate reconciliation so that the church might be strengthened for the trial.⁸⁸ In a few short years, therefore, circumstances forced a drastic change in the attitude of the church toward the absolution of the idolaters.

The chief duties of the sacerdotal order were the ancient ones of baptizing and offering the church's gifts. Hippolytus let the sacrificial imagery run riot. Not only the Eucharist of bread and wine but the additional offerings of oil, cheese, and olives made at certain Eucharists, the agape, and the offerings of first fruits were all sacrifices at which the bishop, or someone whom he had designated, should preside.⁸⁹ Tertullian⁹⁰ and Cyprian⁹¹

⁸⁷ *Epp.* 23 (16), 34 (28).

⁸⁸ *Ep.* 57 (54), 1 f.

⁸⁹ *Ap. Trad.* 4:2, 11 f.; 23:1; 28:3 ff.; 26. Cf. *In Dan. comm.* iv. 35; Ethiopic Statute 26 (R. A. Connolly, *The So-called Egyptian Church Order and Derived Documents* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916], p. 180).

⁹⁰ Cf. *De exh. cast.* 7, 11; *De orat.* 19; *De cultu fem.* ii. 11; *Ad uxor.* ii. 8; *De monog.* 10; *De cor. mil.* 3; *De praescr. haer.* 40; *De spect.* 13.

⁹¹ Cf. *Epp.* 1 (66). 1; 5 (4); 16 (9). 4; 57 (54). 3; 58 (56). 1; 67 (68). 1; 72 (72). 2; *De dom. orat.* 4, 18; cf. also *De rebapt.* 4 f., 10.

limited the church's sacrifice to the Eucharist, but they bear witness to very important developments in the concept. Tertullian tells of some people who believed that when "sacrificial prayers" were said over the elements the bread became the Lord's body and the real sacrifice which might be reserved for later use. Thus the *corpus domini* itself had become the sacrifice.⁹² A few years later Cyprian defined the sacrifice of the Eucharist as "the Lord's passion." Since Christ offered himself to the Father and commanded the Eucharist to be made in commemoration of himself, the priest truly celebrates the rite when his "oblation and sacrifice respond to His passion."⁹³ The increasingly realistic definition of the sacrifice was part of the "materialization" of Christian worship referred to above.

Although both Hippolytus and Tertullian referred to the bishop as high priest and the presbyters as priests,⁹⁴ and although the presbyters were subordinate to the bishop, the distinction of title was not established. Both were called simply *sacerdos*. Tertullian in his last book, *De pudicitia*, thus refers to the bishop who claims the power to forgive sins;⁹⁵ and Cyprian, even though he recognized the rights of the presbyters to offer and sometimes indicated their sacerdotal rank,⁹⁶ usually meant the bishop.⁹⁷

As a priest the bishop, to Cyprian's mind, was God's steward; he was for the time being judge in the stead of Christ.⁹⁸ The Decian persecution, with its problem of the lapsed, and the heresies, with the problem of admitting into the Catholic church those baptized in heresy, required a strong leader. Good scriptural validation for the bishop's power to deal with these problems was found in Deuteronomy: "And the man that will

⁹² *De orat.* 19; *De pud.* 9.

⁹⁴ *De exh. cast.* 7; *Ap. Trad.* 9:1-4.

⁹³ *Ep.* 63 (63). 9, 17.

⁹⁵ Chap. 21.

⁹⁶ *Epp.* 61 (58). 3; 5 (4); 40 (35); 67 (68). 4; 72 (72). 2.

⁹⁷ *Epp.* 55 (52). 8; 57 (54). 3; 67 (68). 1. 4; 43 (40). 4; cf. Pontius Diaconus *Life and Passion of Cyprian* 1. 1 f.; 3. 3; 5. 1; 11. 1, 7; 14. 1.

⁹⁸ *Ep.* 59 (55). 5.

do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest or judge, whoever he shall be in those days, that man shall die." Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and two hundred and fifty companions perished because they opposed Aaron. Solomon, Paul, and Jesus all commanded reverence for the priest.⁹⁹ The bishop, therefore, is to be obeyed. If people set themselves up in opposition to him, they begin heresy and schism; they are first to be rebuked and exhorted to turn from this wickedness; but, if they persist, they are to be excommunicated by the priestly power.¹⁰⁰ If they repent and confess humbly and simply, the priest may grant absolution.¹⁰¹ Strangely enough, Cyprian did not cite Matt. 16:18 f. in support of the bishop's right to pardon; he used it only as a support for his general authority.¹⁰²

Eastern Christianity was much slower to adopt sacrificial and sacerdotal terminology than was Western Christianity. While in the West the Eucharist had become a sacrifice as early as A.D. 150, in the East only the Syrian author of the Didache made that identification. The great theologians of Alexandria either were not aware of or did not accept the idea until almost a century later, when Origen indicated that the Eucharist was the Christian equivalent of pagan sacrificial meals.¹⁰³ In the West the Christian priesthood made its appearance at the very beginning of the third century. In the East it was not until Origen had been in Caesarea a good many years and long after he had visited Rome that he applied sacerdotal terms to the bishops and presbyters.¹⁰⁴ Some of Origen's disciples, them-

⁹⁹ *Epp.* 3 (65); 59 (55). 4; 66 (69). 3; 4 (62). 4; 43 (40). 7; 67 (68). 3.

¹⁰⁰ *De lapsis* 14; *Epp.* 4 (62). 4; 68 (67). 2.

¹⁰¹ *De lapsis* 16-19, 28 f., 36; *Epp.* 55 (52). 17 ff., 29; 57 (54). 2; 15 (10). 1; 64 (59). 1; 59 (55). 16.

¹⁰² *Ep.* 33 (26). 1; *De unit. ecc.* 4.

¹⁰³ *Contra Celsum* viii. 33, 57.

¹⁰⁴ *In Num. hom.* ii. 1; ix. 1; x. 2; xi. 2; *In Jer. hom.* xii. 3; *In Lev. hom.* ii. 3 f.; v. 4, 8, 12; vi. 3, 6; vii. 1; *In Gen. hom.* xvi. 5; *In lib. Jesu Nave hom.* x. 3; *In lib. I Reg. hom.* i. 7; *In Ps. xxxvii hom.* ii. 6; *De orat.* xxviii. 9.

selves bishops, laid more stress on their rights as priests. Firmilian of Caesarea in Cappadocia, for example, claimed the power of remitting sins through his succession to the apostles.¹⁰⁵ But it is only in Syria that the priestly powers of the bishop are fully described in the middle of the third century. There the bishop and he alone is the priest. "The Levite and high priest is the bishop. He is the minister of the word and mediator." It is through him that the oblations are offered to God.¹⁰⁶ The bishop has been "set in the place of God Almighty" and "has put on the person of Christ"; therefore, he must conduct himself as one who has authority to judge sinners and to grant forgiveness of sin to the repentant. "For to you bishops it is said in the gospel: That which ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven."¹⁰⁷

IV

The survey of the evidence has made it possible to answer some of the questions which prompted this study. The Christian priesthood appeared simultaneously in Rome and in North Africa *circa* A.D. 200. There seems to be no evidence for its existence in the East until late in Origen's life. The fact that Origen and Firmilian, both of whom are known to have had contact with the West, are the first to mention the priestly powers of the bishop may indicate that the concept spread from the West to the East.

The priesthood was only one aspect of the rise of the Christian cult. Sacrificial and sacerdotal imagery had never been absent from the Christian movement, but in the beginning these terms were used in a spiritualized sense. Christ's death on the cross was the great sacrifice that brought to an end the ancient worship. A humble spirit, prayer, and praise were the true sacrifices of the believers. Christ was the great high priest and mediator; the Christians, a priestly race. Between A.D. 150 and 200 pagan criticism of the Christians for their atheism, their neglect

¹⁰⁵ Cyprian *Ep.* 75 (75). 16.

¹⁰⁶ *Didasc. Apost.* 8 f. (ii. 25-28, 35).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 4-7 (ii. 6-24).

of the recognized gods of the state, forced Christian apologists to rethink their teachings on God and worship and led Justin Martyr to identify the prayer of thanksgiving over the eucharistic elements as the Christian sacrifice par excellence. Once made, this identification was generally adopted because it met pagan criticism so neatly and, we may suspect, because it answered a vaguely felt desire of the Christians, who could not rid themselves entirely of the attitudes they had held as pagans.

The identification of the Eucharist as the sacrifice meant that sooner or later the officiant at that rite should be called a "priest." The two ideas are correlative, and to that extent we may say the priesthood was an indigenous development. The consciousness that the sacramental cults of Isis and Mithra, which made the same claims as Christianity to wash away their devotees' guilt and assure them of immortality, had priests to administer their rites may have eased the way for the rise of the Christian priesthood. Certainly it was not an imitation of the Jewish institution. Once the idea was introduced, however, abundant biblical validation was found for the powers which the bishop had come to possess. The usefulness of the new title assured its permanence.

